

## Precision Engineers: Endangered Species?

Once they were one of the largest groups of skilled employees in the whole country, and formed the backbone of one of the biggest and most important industries in the UK. They were respected throughout the world, and their skills were in great demand globally because of this. Nowadays however, their numbers are in such decline that if they were an animal, they would surely be on a list of endangered species.

The number of precision engineers in this country has dropped steadily over the last 25 years, for various reasons, to the current levels which are lower than ever before. With the decline of engineering as a whole in the UK resulting in fewer engineering companies, many precision engineers have left the industry to do something completely different. Their skills are lost forever, but an equally worrying statistic is the amount of people entering engineering. The number of school leavers joining the profession is at an all time low, and there are various reasons for this. Engineering can be dirty, physically demanding and is far from glamorous. Furthermore, the remuneration, especially when starting out, can be bettered in various other sectors, and the training can take anything up to 6 or 7 years before the trainee is considered fully skilled. Apprenticeships, once the standard way of entering precision engineering, are nowadays pretty rare and also schools have become increasingly reluctant to teach metalwork to teenagers. Many youngsters would rather go straight into a job where they can wear nice clothes and sit in front of a computer or work in a large supermarket and get paid well for it from day one. The idea of 'learning a trade' seems redundant to them when they can be earning better money immediately doing a mundane job, and the fact that they may still be doing those mundane jobs in 20 years would not occur to them. With the skills shortage so bad within engineering, many companies are turning to the European Union to provide their precision engineers. There has been an influx of skilled engineers entering the country in recent years, especially from old Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland and the Baltic states. Whilst these workers are most welcome, and are filling a skills gap, it does mean that some companies are reliant on other countries for their precision engineers, which is a far from desirable situation.

The amount of highly skilled, qualified precision engineers still working in the sector may be dropping, but one company that is bucking the trend is Machined Precision Components Ltd, based at Watton, Norfolk. All of their precision engineers are time served, having completed full apprenticeships, and they have an average of over 20 years experience within the industry. As director David Isbell says: "Because our engineers have such a wealth of experience in all areas of precision engineering, we can provide the customer with the highest quality product at all times. Yet these same skills ensure that the prices are kept very competitive, and the components are produced in the quickest time possible. We can give a superb service in all areas, but we could not do this without our highly trained precision engineers"

So we can rest assured, that whilst there may not be the amount of precision engineers in the UK that there once were, the ones who are left are still doing the superb job that they always were!

### About the Author

Lee Hunton is a qualified engineer with 25 years experience in the industry. He has worked in [Precision Engineering](#) in the UK and Europe. Machined Precision Components Ltd website can be found at: [www.mpcltd.net](http://www.mpcltd.net)

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